

In This Issue

Page 3 — Executive Director Sean T. Casey on the Best Places to Work

Page 5 — Get to Know a Legislator

Page 6 — The OSI Connection Hub

Page 7 — Calendar of Events

Page 8 and 9 — Best Practices

Page 10 — Tucker VR Opens New Office

Page 11 — All the News That's Fit to Print

Page 12 — We Want to Hear From You

Page 13 — Manning the Gates

Page 14 — An Employer Shares His Thanks

Page 15 — Faculty/Student Basketball Game at RWS

Page 16 — Let's Do the Numbers

Page 17 — If the Shoe Fits

Page 18 — Employee of the Quarter at RWS

Page 19 — One Client's Story

Best Places to Work By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

Earlier this month, we had an opportunity to spend an evening with some of our city's top business leaders at the Atlanta Business Chronicle's Best Places to Work Awards. The industries ran the gamut, from tech to real estate to construction to house cleaning. Naturally, I asked myself, what makes a place of employment a best place to work? Before I entered my public service career, I got my hands dirty at a couple of starter jobs. I learned to flip a pretty mean pizza at the mall in my home town of Buffalo. I also did a stint at a factory where we packed books into boxes. Those early work opportunities weren't prestigious, but I enjoyed them, and they taught me what it took to be a part of a team.

Why do we get up and go to work every day? Many of us in public service joke it's not to get rich, but in reality, every one of us has financial obligations. There are spouses, children, bills, mortgages or rent, student loans, aging parents, and those are just the things we plan for. We all need to support ourselves.

Because a source of income is a necessity for the vast majority of us who aren't independently wealthy, it's nice when the job that provides for our needs is something that also gives us a sense of purpose. And sometimes, if you truly hit the career jackpot, you find a 'Best Place to Work'. At the awards dinner, I listened to video testimonials from nominated companies' employees and heard the acceptance speeches from winning CEO's. Some commonalities stood out.

First, the leaders of these best workplaces were outwardly focused rather than self-centered. They spoke a different language, but it wasn't overly coached marketing speak. They talked more about their

coworkers than they did about themselves. Seldom did I hear any of the leaders on stage use phrases like "my employees" or "my staff". They discussed their colleagues and used plural pronouns with a natural ease, tending to seem less prepackaged and more comfortable in their own skin. The applause from their companies was louder and more natural, and the posture of those who accompanied them on stage was relaxed. These CEOs and the people around them had a certain, unforced quality that escapes easy description and inspires equal measures of admiration and envy.

Additionally, employees who spoke on behalf of their best workplaces echoed over and over that they felt appreciated. At the awards banquet, small, medium, large and extra large employers were showcased, and while pay scale never entered the discussion, I imagine salaries ran a broad spectrum. However, the employees' narratives all exuded a sense of belonging. You sensed community, and imagined feelings of appreciation extended beyond the occasional staff potluck to a pervasive internal culture. During the most impactful testimonials, you were left with the feeling that you were watching the team at a family business, perhaps wanting to work there yourself.

Charged with the humbling task of steering an organization myself, I want to create a best place to work. I know those of you who have the privilege of managing others do as well. While we can be sure we will make mistakes, we can also be sure to do our best to treat our coworkers with respect at all times. I believe that doing so begins with honesty. People are smart, and in vocational rehabilitation—a lot of our colleagues go to school a long time to be able to do what they do. They know when you're being



sincere, and even when they don't agree with tough decisions, they appreciate the truth.

They also appreciate communication and transparency, maybe even erring on the side of over-communication. Professionals with full client caseloads have information coming at them all day, every day. Who among us hasn't lost track of something in the shuffle? Friendly reminders never hurt, even if you're sure you've already said something a couple of times. Open communication also helps avoid misunderstandings, not just between supervisors and staff, but between

coworkers too. Finally, devote some quality time to the people you lead. Paying compliments or giving feedback via emails or texts is thoughtful, but actual conversations, face-to-face if at all possible, are preferable every time. It is tempting to opt for the convenience of technology with our demanding schedules, but no amount of convenience will ever replace a genuine investment in your employees.

Wouldn't it be nice if, wherever your journey leads, you know you created someone's best place to work along the way?







Get to Know a Legislator This Month We Feature Shaw Blackmon



Shaw Blackmon was raised in Houston County along with his brother Brad and sister Kayce.

Following graduation from Warner Robins High School, Blackmon attended the University of Georgia where he

completed his degree in Management Information Systems. Upon moving back to Houston County, Shaw began working in sales for National Bank Products, a small family business founded by the Blackmon family.

After 10 years in sales, Shaw moved into management and operations, prior to becoming President and CEO. Shaw's commitment to community has been longstanding, as he is passionate in making our region of the state the best place to work, live and raise a family. He has served on the board of the Houston County Development Authority, and been an active member of the Perry Area and Robins Regional Chambers, serving as board Chairman for the Robins Chamber in 2012.

In these roles, he has worked to promote new industry, facilitate expansion, and provide mediums from which businesses can broaden their customer base. Blackmon also volunteers his time serving foundations dedicated to strengthening Georgia's educational systems. Central Georgia Technical College and the Houston County Heritage Foundation, benefiting K-12 public education, have allowed Shaw to work on behalf of our educational community, ensuring students are well prepared to service our region's economic development

and growth.

As a member of the Technical College System of Georgia State Board, he has worked to provide our state with a more seamless approach to education by improving transferability between the technical colleges and the University system, as well as, enhancing dualenrollment opportunities with the Department of Education. Through continued outreach, Shaw continues to be heavily involved in the effort to bring investment back to Houston County. This includes funding for the Veteran's Training Center and the Health Science facility on the primary campus of Central Georgia Technical College.

Shaw was elected to the 146th District in 2015 and serves on Economic Development & Tourism, Governmental Affairs, Insurance, Special Rules, and Ways & Means Committees. He serves as Chair of the Sales Tax Committee on Ways & Means. Shaw also serves on the Majority Whip Team and is a member of the Military Affairs Working Group. Shaw resides in Warner Robins with his wife, Whitney and stepson, Ges. They are members of Central Baptist Church in Warner Robins.

Shaw will continue to focus on the issues near to his heart and his background – strengthening our defense community, enhancing education, and getting government out of the way of small businesses so that Houston County can continue to grow and thrive for future generations.

The OSI Connection Hub On Setting SmartObjectives

By Kristen May for Chron.com

The GVRA Office of Strategy and Innovation is working with organization staff to set measured and realistic objectives. Below is an article highlighting how the process works. Even though it takes the tackles goals from a small business perspective, it can help guide our thinking as well.

Defining the objectives of a small business helps focus all aspects of business strategy and management toward achieving the goals in mind. The business owner and close advisers should sit down to create objectives that have a few key elements and key purposes to guide the business going forward.

Smart Objectives

The acronym SMART is often used to describe the best type of business objective. All objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Time-specific. This means that you should clearly define the objective in a way that allows you to determine at a specific later date whether you have met that objective. In addition, you should set objectives that are possible to attain, based on market conditions and the size of your business. Lastly, set both short-term and long-term objectives to give you measurable steps and long-term vision.

Direct Business

Use your objectives to help inform the business decisions you make. The objectives should be clear enough to help you decide how to staff your business, what market to target and what areas to look toward expanding into in the future.

continue revisiting the objectives you wrote to determine whether business changes you are considering will help you meet your objectives.

Measure Progress

Because business objectives need to be measurable, concrete goals, you can measure whether a business is meeting its objectives. For example, if one of the business objectives is to grow the client base by 10 percent every quarter until reaching a market share of 70 percent, chart progress toward this objective on a regular basis.

If you are not meeting an objective, this encourages you to consider what about your business is not functioning correctly and how you can make adjustments to continue progress toward an objective.

Motivate Staff

Design your business objectives to motivate other staff members to work toward the goals that you have set out. To do this, the objectives need to be easy for all employees to understand and must be actionable for employees. Create a poster with the objectives and hang it in a visible location as a constant reminder of the business objectives.

You can also tie specific incentives to meeting the objectives as further motivation.



Change your life! Start Your GVRA Referral Today.

Call the GIB Referral Hotline.

1.888.226.3444

Calendar of Events Save the Date

ABILITIES EXPO: WICKED AWESOME FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

September 21 through September 23 The Boston Convention & Exhibition Center 415 Summer Street Boston, MA

SILC Gala

September 25 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The Rooftop Terrace at Atlantic Station 201 17th Street NW Atlanta, GA

GAPSE 2018 Training Conference

October 9 through October 11 UGA Center for Continuing Education & Hotel 1197 South Lumpkin Street Athens, GA

NOSSCR's Biannual Disability Law Conference

October 17 through October 20 Hilton Union Square 333 O'Farrell St San Francisco

The Arc's National Convention 2018

November 8 through November 10 Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center 2800 Opryland Drive Nashville, TN

Supported Decision-Making Symposium

November 16 Macon, GA Location TBD



Best Practices From GVRA's Partnership with DEI

GVRA recently partnered with the Disability Employment Initiative to establish a series of best practices. Below is the product of that partnership.

The Challenge: Job seekers with disabilities often need to navigate a maze of multiple systems to access resources that will allow them to get the skills they need and to achieve meaningful employment outcomes. Because of separate functional silos, duplication or fragmentation of services may result and thus not maximize effectiveness for people with disabilities.

The Strategy: The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grantee in Georgia has funded a full-time Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) within the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) creates a DEI specific VR counselor whose entire caseload would consist of shared coenrolled WIOA title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs) and WIOA title IV (VR Program) customers. This counselor would be involved in all DEI strategies, including Integrated Resource Teams (IRT), blending and braiding of funds, customized employment, and career pathway training. The role of this counselor is to serve as an example for the workforce system on how innovative strategic partnerships can be operationalized between an American Job Center (One-Stop) and VR Office.

The Plan: Mr. Cory Yeung, VR counselor, is employed with GVRA. Cory divides his time between two regions - the Northeast Georgia Workforce Region and the Central Savannah River Workforce Region. He mainly works out of the GVRA offices in Athens and Augusta, but sometimes travels to meet job seekers in their respective communities. His caseload exclusively

consists of co-enrolled customers in WIOA. Since starting in January 2017, Cory received approximately 50 referrals from the DEI Disability Resource Coordinators (DRC) from both regions.

Cory works alongside each region's DRC to set up IRT meetings and assists in resource mapping. The IRT approach involves diversified service systems (e.g., WIOA, mental health, public education, local Housing or Transportation system, etc.) coordinating services and leveraging funding in order to meet the needs of an individual job seeker with a disability. Resource mapping is a strategy that is used to inform a job seeker of everything that is available to assist one in reaching an employment goal. Resources can include funding, education and work-based learning opportunities, and job accommodations. Cory also provides the service of counseling to support the job seeker work toward achieving the employment goal.

System/Workforce/WIOA Outcomes:

Today, approximately sixty-five percent of all job seekers working with Georgia's DEI DRCs are also co-enrolled with the vocational rehabilitation program. Having Cory (from VR) as a part of Georgia's DEI project established an innovative model for how different workforce systems can work together for the benefit of our customers - job seekers with disabilities. Cory shared that he has observed the challenges for someone seeking services from different entities. However, as a result of his field experience on integrating services and further implementing the WIOA vision to provide seamless customer service, he believes he has the required knowledge



to assist people navigate through functional silos with more confidence. This collaborative partnership model has also provided several DEI DRCs a better understanding of the vocational rehabilitation process.

Overall, in an environment of tightened budgets, it is especially important for WIOA program partners to collaborate and pool resources to further maximize positive outcomes for both job seekers with disabilities and workforce programs.

Key Career Pathway Elements: Build crossagency partnerships and clarify roles; Align policies and programs: and Measure system change and performance.

Additional Resources on this Topic:

- Integration of VR into the Workforce Development System The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center provides training and technical assistance to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, related agencies, professionals and service providers to help develop skills and processes to meet requirements of WIOA. Integration of VR into the Workforce System is one of five topic areas. In this tool kit, you will find resources in the form of guidance, literature, and practice.
- Integrated Resource Team (IRT) Information and Resources: This page provides information on what an IRT is, their many benefits, and how to form one with a job seeker.
- WorkforceGPS Disability and Employment Community: An online resource destination for the American Job Center network, people with disabilities, and employers. In addition, this is a resource for all key stakeholders who partner with the workforce system to provide services and programs to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Check out The Playlists: Disability Resources for WIOA Practitioners Each playlist includes links to

resources on a specific topic related to improving service to individuals with disabilities. The resources are intended for use by workforce development professionals, employers, rehabilitation services providers, adult educators, and other practitioners.

- WIOA State Plans and Section 188 Compliance: This section of the LEAD Technical Assistance Center web page contains resources related to Section 188 compliance, AJC certification, and guidance on WIOA state plans. Included is a three part webinar series that can guide and inform an AJC on this topic with specific and relevant examples.
- WorkforceGPS Career Pathways Community: An online resource that helps workforce development leaders, practitioners, and policymakers expand state and local career pathways efforts currently underway or being planned. The collection of resources will enhance knowledge, skills, and expertise in building effective career pathways systems.

The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) aims to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes for youth and adults with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits. ODEP jointly funds and administers the DEI with DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA).

To learn more, visit the DEI website at https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/DEI.htm.



Home Sweet Home Tucker VR Gets New Digs





Suite 200, Tucker, GA 30084.

VR staff in Tucker recently moved office locations. Their current location is 5238 Royal Woods Parkway,



Fit to Print One GVRA Client Breaks Into Newspapers

Every week, thousands of people throughout North Georgia read Debi Holcomb's newspaper columns. You've heard this story before. A person has a dream from a young age and after overcoming adversity, they achieve their dream. It's inspirational. It follows a script. But this isn't that story.

Prior to last year, Debi had never done much writing beyond putting numbers on spreadsheets. Throughout the early part of career, she worked at a water plant doing data analysis and providing administrative support to the engineers who worked there. That's when the story that was Debi's life first went off script.

In 2009, due to a degenerative illness, Debi's vision grew to a point of impairment where she was having a hard time doing her job. She reached out to what was then the Vocational Rehabilitation program within the Georgia Department of Labor—now the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency—and after an assessment, they provided her with a text magnifying tool. This proved an effective stopgap, but after the better part of a year, her vision worsened, and she was ultimately fired.

Fast forward to 2016. Having been on benefits and without a job for the better part of decade, Debi made the decision to come back to VR. She knew she was capable of working. She had not only held a job in the past but she'd been good at it. She just needed a push in the right direction.

"I wanted to find out what I could do," she said. "It was still a difficult transition, and at times, I fought it every inch of the way. Sometimes I wanted to give up, but I knew that wasn't an option."

VR connected her with Vision Rehabilitation Services of GA in Smyrna (https://vrsga.org) where she had the opportunity for the first time to interact with people who were in a similar situation.

"It was the first time I really spent time around other legally blind or blind people. They were holding down jobs, and they were coming in and getting trained to do jobs," Debi said. "This big lightbulb went off, and I realized I really could do this. So I told myself "I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this now."

Her counselors encouraged her to volunteer or intern, in doing so proving that she could handle the work load and assuage the concerns of any potential new employer. After several nonstarters, she was able to get her foot in the door at the Fannin Sentinel, a weekly newspaper, in North Georgia. She started out working one day a week, and soon it became clear that she had a talent for the written word that had—to this point in her life—gone unnoticed.

What started out as a one-day-a-week volunteer opportunity turned into a fulltime job, which sees her covering 11 meetings, writing three or four stories a week and still finding the time to write two weekly columns.

Where her story was once full of doubt and uncertainty, it now has passion and is driven by a sense of optimism, she said.

"In the very beginning I thought this is going to be impossible," she said. "If you have the help and support, you can do whatever you set your mind to."



Ideas Welcome On GVRA's New Ideas Initiative

The GVRA Initiative for New Ideas was rolled out on May 10 of this year at the request of Executive Director Sean Casey and implemented by the Office of Strategy & Innovation (OSI). The purpose of this initiative is to allow staff around the state to submit their ideas and initiatives aimed at enhancing customer service, productivity and staff morale.

If you have an idea that will improve how clients are served or streamline current processes, please fill out the GVRA New Idea Worksheet (sample below) and then email your sheet to:

InnovationExchangeSI@gvs.ga.gov.

The worksheet can also be found on NAVEX.

Once submitted, you will be contacted by a staff member of the OSI to vet your idea.

"We know folks have great ideas, and we want to hear from them," said OSI Director Raj Gandy. "The systematic process for which the OSI has developed allows 'hidden voices' to be heard and recognized for their accomplishments."

If you have any questions, please email Raj at Rajaunnda.Gandy@gvs.ga.gov.

GVRA New Idea Worksheet (P) (P)









Name of Initiative		Name of Lead (Idea Owner)	Lead Phone Number	Email Address
Description (Describe the new initiative and how it is expected to be implemented)				
Strategic Objective(s) (What is the goal of this initiative? Will this initiative resolve current issues? What is being accomplished as a result?)			Client Engagement	Customer Service
			Increase Teamwork Effective Time Mgmt.	Other Other
			Effective Communication	Other
FOR S&I USE	Decision Date	Signature	UI	NAVEX

Manning the Gates RWS Student Excels in Law Enforcement

Recently, Tiffany Hudson, Assistant Director of Student Employment Services at Roosevelt Warm Springs, visited Kia Manufacturing in West Point, GA. As she, along with other Vocational Rehabilitation staff, neared the gates of the facility, Mrs. Hudson recognized a familiar face. Max Perez, a former participant at Roosevelt Warm Springs, was manning the security checkpoint.

"We're all so proud of Max for all he's accomplished," Hudson said. "We know that all of our students can accomplish so many great things, and it's inspiring to see them shine."

Max was admired for his professional demeanor as he followed protocol, radioing team members to ensure that the group was on the list of guests expected for the day. While waiting on radio responses, Max spoke to Hudson and the group members, asking about the many team members at RWS who guided his journey to employment. Once Max had cleared the group for entry into the plant, he was gracious enough to pose for a picture at the request of the group.

Max was a student at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) from 2011 – 2012. While at RWS, Max had a desire to work in the law enforcement field. He received training at RWS' Facility Police Department as a dispatcher. He also took part in a Ride-A-Long Training as an Officer Trainee. Both opportunities proved valuable, as Max completed Roosevelt Warm Springs with a job with Meriwether County Sheriff's Department as an emergency dispatcher.

While with Meriwether County Sheriff's Officer, Max was promoted to a radio programmer. He later obtained secondary employment in Troup County, as a jailer. He is currently working as a Main Lot Security Guard at Kia Manufacturing. Max expressed his appreciation for the knowledge that he gained while at RWS and felt that it was a vital part of his current success.



A Better Place An Employer Shares His Thanks

By Jeremey Nease, Owner of Badcock Home Furnishings and More

Christopher Mazurkiewicz has literally made Rincon Badcock a better place. Late last year when VR Counselor Assistant Sandra McBride came by my store in Rincon, Georgia in search of host businesses for local high school students to receive employment skills training, I had no idea what I should expect. Even though I had prior experience with a similar program while managing the Badcock Store in Metter, this sounded slightly different and almost too good to be possible.

After talking things over with my managers and staff, we were excited and eager to get involved. When Christopher came to us from Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency as a Community Work Adjustment student, we were kind of nervous and wondering what was in store.

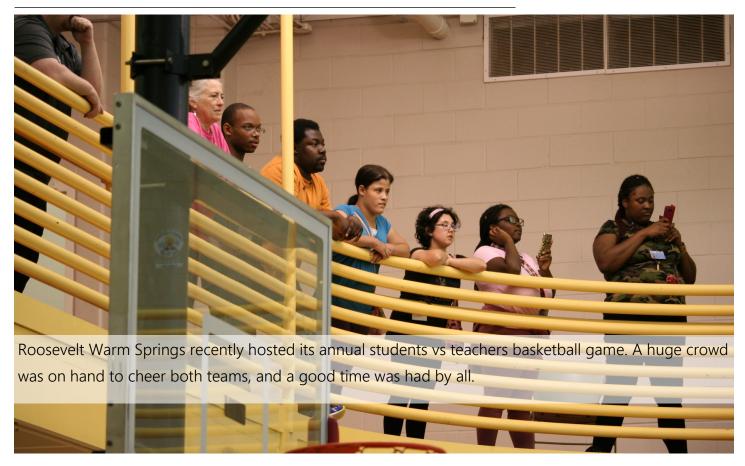
I'm happy to say that it did not take very long for our nerves to settle, and before long Christopher fit in just like one of the long-time Badcock crew members. Mrs. McBride's visits were less frequent as Christopher began to demonstrate employment skills essential for competitive employment.

Christopher graduated from South Effingham High School in May 2018, and the Rincon Badcock Team is so proud of him. To celebrate his hard work and dedication, we gifted him with a GameStop gift card and a job offer for a permanent position with the business.

Christopher accepted both the gift card and the job offer! We are proud to have him as a permanent employee with us at the Rincon Badcock.



Hitting the Hardwood The Annual RWS Students v. Teachers Game





Let's Do the Numbers VR Sets Statewide Goals

GVRA Leadership recently rolled out the goals for the organization's vocational rehabilitation efforts through the current fiscal year.

"A well trained staff leads to exceptional outcomes and overall compliance," said Interim Vocational Services Director Lee Brinkley-Bryan. "A well trained staff is critical to giving clients the best experience possible."

Lee said that the goals are intentionally conservative, and she wouldn't be surprised if field staff surpass them. To have the

maximum impact on services, the goals focus on compliance, client experiences and data management, among other things.

"What a talented and dedicated staff we have across vocational services," Lee said. "We all have a lot of anticipation as we move into a new state fiscal year and a new federal fiscal year that a lot of great things are right on the horizon. We're prepared for it."

2018 - 2019 Statewide Goals

VR Applications

9,612

VR Applications
Processed

12,648

VR IPE's Developed

8,736

VR Successful Closures

2,895

Monthly Team Goals

40 Offices / 52 Teams Statewide



VR Applications

9,612 ÷ 52 teams = 184.8 185 ÷ 12 months = 15.4



VR Applications
Processed

12,648 ÷ 52 teams = 243.2 243.2 ÷ 12 months = 20.2



VR IPE's Developed

8,736 ÷ 52 teams = 168 168 ÷ 12 months = 14



VR Successful Closures

2,895 ÷ 52 teams = 55.7 55.7 ÷ 12 months = 4.6 4.6 rounded up to 5 × 2 = 10 (to ensure 90 day Employment)

Together we can do this!

If the Shoe Fits A Passion for Horses to a Job

By CRC Angela Browning

Russell Hudson is a 2017 Loganville High School (LHS) graduate. As a child, he was diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia, which presented challenges for him throughout his school years.

Russell's true passion is horses. He has spent several summers working on a local farm assisting with the care and training of the horses, and he began a mentorship with a well-known local farrier, who saw Russell's potential for the craft and his overall love of horses. A farrier is a craftsman who trims and shoes horses' hooves.

During our first meeting at LHS, Russell was very clear about his career goals; he wanted to become a farrier and was adamant about attend Oklahoma Horseshoeing School. While other proprietary schools offered the training courses he needed, this was the

best, and he declared that no matter how long he had to save up, that was the school for him.

His mentor made him an offer, that if he complete the 12-week course and acquired his certifications, he would hire him upon his return. GVRA was able to make this a reality for Russell through financial assistance, AWT assessment and a loaner laptop for his courses.

Russell excelled at his classes, worked hard to overcome the challenges of his disability, and has been successfully employed as a farrier since January 2018, with an average wage of \$150 per day as a newcomer. His reputation in this field is growing, and he is living his dream.



Take a Bow

C. Armstrong wins RWS Employee of Quarter





Getting the Job Done One Client's Story

Todd Floyd is another example of a satisfied customer who has found a job thanks to GVRA.

Mr. Floyd sought services at the agency because he had vision and hearing problems, was unemployed, and needed assistance finding a job. His counselor, Juana Fletcher, helped provide him numerous services to help him along the way, including counseling and guidance, diagnosis and treatment of impairments, vision, hearing and speech – language pathology services, job search assistance, job placement assistance and public transportation.

As a result, Mr. Floyd had glowing things to say about his time with GVRA. He said he

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

was more than satisfied with the services he received and that if it wasn't for the assistance he received from VR, he would not be working.

Mr. Floyd, who also is a pastor of the church in Camilla, was so impressed with his experience with Ms. Fletcher and VR, that he recommended the agency many times to others. He proudly stated that several other people who heard him heaping praises on GVRA are currently receiving services from the agency themselves.

Mr. Floyd works for Xencom Facility Management as a parking lot sweeper at the Albany Mall. For this full-time job, he earns \$360 a week.

Training Day



www.gvs.ga.gov



